

Islamist Party Identity in Right-Wing Milieus: The Case of the National Outlook Movement in Kayseri (1960–1980)

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Introduction

How do Islamist¹ collective actors draw symbolic boundaries that differentiate »us« from »them« (Silver 1997) and sustain collective action? This paper revisits that question through a study of the National Outlook Movement (Milli Görüş Hareketi, MG) parties² between the years 1960 and 1980. Focusing on local right-wing networks in a central Anatolian town, Kayseri, differential recruitment³ to the MG from these milieus, and the agency, action and interaction of the MG elites and activists within and outside the movement, it proposes a relational and localized perspective on the process of Islamist collective identity construction, i.e., symbolic boundary making.⁴

Current research on Islamist collective actors criticizes its predecessors for treating Muslimness as an *a priori* identity and »tak[ing] material and cultural

1 The term Islamist will be defined subsequently.

2 National Order Party (Milli Nizam Partisi, NOP) and National Salvation Party (Milli Selamet Partisi, NSP). The movement adopted the name MG later, by the mid-1970s, and its members identified themselves mostly through reference to the party names (»Nizamci« and »Selametçi«). This paper will use Milli Görüş (MG) to facilitate reading and underline the continuity in the movement.

3 The concept of differential entry/recruitment refers to the question of divergence in entering an incipient or long standing movement among the individuals populating a common area, network, group, social class, etc. In other words, it deals with the question of why and how a movement can recruit some individuals but not others. While socio-political and historical-institutionalist perspectives attribute differential entry to social-economic frustrations and/or aspirations of particular classes, having adopted macroperspectives they also forego micromobilization processes and ignore political, institutional, generational, ideational (the saliency of other subidentities) and organizational factors at play.

4 This paper is based on the parts of the author's larger PhD project on political engagement patterns of Islamist movements between 1960 and 1980.

factors as additive, « neglecting »how they are intertwined and articulated« (Tuğal 2002: 90, see also Wiktorowicz 2004 and Munson 2001). Drawing mainly on Social Movement Theories, but also other neo-institutionalist, relational and constructivist perspectives, this new corpus demonstrates that identities of Islamist collective actors are not ascribed, but acquired. It argues that the identity process was shaped through changing formal and informal political institutions, various forms of material and symbolic interactions, and resources within the political field. The current literature, thus, opens the black box of both the political field and the Islamist movements, and paves the ground for studying changes and ruptures through time and space. While this study aims to follow in these footsteps, it also seeks to fill what appears to be a lacuna.

The new corpus treats Islam merely as a pool of resources, symbolic boundary formation as a creative but straightforward process, and, with notable exceptions, largely ignores the (inter)action, resources and constraints at the local level of the movement's context. As Salwa Ismail demonstrates, neither is Islam ahistorical, nor is Muslim society a homogenous body (2003: 15–26). She draws upon Sami Zubaida's analyses that reject the view of Islam as a coherent sociological and political entity, and of Islamic cultural products as constants in Muslim majority societies. Under an apparent unity, which blurs the boundaries, Islam is subject to various rival interpretations at any time and place, and Muslimness, while being shared by other members of the society, is also a subjectively defined individual identity (Ismail 2003: 16, Zubaida 1995: 151). Plurality of »Islam« and Muslimness, in turn, implies that any redefinition of Muslimness through a differentiation process of a group or individual entails a »dynamic power and resistance« (Ismail 2003: 17). Studying Islamist symbolic boundary formation, and understanding its complex and dynamic nature, requires thus taking into account power relations and resistance at the local level, as these inevitably influence identity process of an incipient or developing collective actor.

The term Islamist is, thus, used as an analytical tool to differentiate such collective actors as MG from other Muslims and understand their interactions. Islamism can be defined as formal or informal activities bearing direct or indirect influence on the power relations and institutions of the political field(s) and on the (re)distribution of material and symbolic resources controlled by state institutions through the intensive use, (re)interpretation and articulation of traditions, signs and symbols, and oral and written sources of Islam in novel ways (Ismail 2003: 2) in order to create and sustain mobilization. This definition has two analytical uses: first, whether or not a collective actor seeks to refashion the state and society based on Islam ceases to be relevant for analysis as it makes room for multifaceted and dynamic goals, as well as recognizes that these groups interact with and influence the political fields notwithstanding their »true« intentions. Sec-

ond, problems related to the use of the terms »Muslim« or »Islamic«⁵ are avoided. Since Muslimness both creates certain homogeneity and is subject to various definitions and accompanying power struggles, a collective actor cannot be singled out as Muslim without denying Muslim subjectivity (or authenticity) to others. Nor particularities of one »Muslim« group vis-à-vis other organized and unorganized Muslims can be understood. The adjective Islamic, in turn, when used for a collective actor inadvertently reproduces its members' claims of being the true vehicle or expression of Islam, which creates similar analytical problems with the usage of »Muslim«.

Based on these (re)conceptualizations and a relational analytical framework, this paper tackles the issue of MG's Islamist identity construction as follows: how did the MG's identity that sustained its mobilization at the local level emerge? Was MG a predetermined and aggregated result of a cultural/religious (or economic) cleavage between the center and periphery? Did the MG's identity emerge only in opposition to the »center«? How did local networks, social and spatial settings, and power relations during the late 1960s and 1970s influence the process? Can Islam be considered merely as a resource in the identity construction of an Islamist collective actor? This paper argues that Islamist identities such as the MG identity a) are not preconceived, pre-collective action and pre-political, instead, b) they are shaped in relation to not only national level, but also the local environment and its power relations, c) they emerge through both conscious efforts and subliminal processes. Conscious efforts of mobilizing actors render Islam a »constraint« when the actors meet the »resistance« of existing organized and unorganized Muslims (or other Islamists for that matter), which, in turn, impact the way in which Islamists draw their symbolic boundaries.

The paper is organized in three sections. The first section introduces the local right wing networks from which MG recruited its activists and addresses the question of differential recruitment. The second section examines the creative and subliminal aspects of MG's symbolic boundary formation within the rightwing milieu where the MG elites and activists targeted to recruit from and then competed with the members of already established right wing collective actors such as the incumbent Justice Party (JP), Risale-i Nur Students (RNS)⁶ and the Nationalist Action Party (NAP). The last section provides a brief overview of the research findings and its implications.

5 Unless, of course, they are defined in relation to non-Muslim collective religious actors.

6 The RNS, or the Nur students constituted an Islamist »new religious movement«. The movement was organized around the writings and persona of its leader Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1873–1960). The term new religious movement refers to those religious, or spiritual collectivities that display novel and even unorthodox teachings and behaviors that may or may not draw upon established religious institutions.

Research for this essay is based on in-depth interviews (and oral histories)⁷, a study of MG publications, local and national newspapers (1960–1980), memoirs of various political actors and court files. In-depth interviews were conducted with national and local MG entrepreneurs and activists, and local leaders and activists of such groups as Yeni Asya branch (the largest group before its further split) of Risale-i Nur students, the RNS, Akıncılar⁸, Büyük Doğucular⁹ and major non-Islamist parties (Republican People's Party (RPP), JP and NAP). Overall, data gathered on 38 MG activists, 12 JP activists¹⁰, four NAP activists and 17 non-MG Islamists, helped to highlight the frontiers of the right wing milieu in Kayseri in the 1960s and 1970s.

Right Wing Milieu and Differential Recruitment in Kayseri

Local social networks constitute »frontiers of the *milieu partisan* [the social settings of the party activists], which is considered as the set of relations consolidated between groups whose members, though not necessarily aiming at participating in the construction of the political party, contribute to [its establishment] through their activities« (Sawicki 1997: 24). In other words, while they facilitate and inform the mobilization processes through helping information flow, facilitating contact with individuals and rendering their constituents predisposed to sympathize with certain ideas and frames (Diani and McAdam 2003), not all, in fact few of its members, can be recruited as activists. Providing a thick description of the networks from which MG recruited its activists and analyzing differential recruitment/entry to MG a) reveals the heterogeneity and power relations of the »periphery« and b) highlights the context within which MG activists constructed their identity in relation to the other members of these networks.

7 Although most of the participants gave their consent for the publication of their names, to protect their privacy only codes or previous affiliations will be used as identification.

8 Akıncılar, or the Raiders, was the semi-autonomous youth organization of MG.

9 Büyük Doğucular, or the Members of the Great East was an informal network of young Islamists, mostly members of the National Turkish Student Union (Milli Türk Talebe Birliği, known by its famous acronym the MTTB) who regularly met and discussed various political and literary issues around the views of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek published in Büyük Doğu (the Great East) Magazine.

10 Interviews with the JP activists entailed 6 face-to-face and 6 telephone interviews. Two interviews were from Konya, which helped to understand Kayseri case better.

Local Networks, Social and Spatial Settings in Kayseri

To begin with, four main professional categories appeared among the studied 38 MG official and unofficial¹¹ leaders and activists in Kayseri: civil engineers/building contractors (8), skilled craftsmen working in factories or in their workshops (mostly ironworkers, machinists, fitters, but also carpenter or woodworkers) (6), traders in fibers, textiles, carpets (6), and finally men of religion (5)¹² working in mosques or religious vocational schools.¹³ The professional relations within which the MG activists were embedded did not necessarily entail business relations. Individuals exercising similar or related professions might know each other from vocational school, university, factory, or from some other social setting in which their professional affinity or common areas of interest brought them into contact.

As far as the business networks are concerned, one should take into account the economic context of the late 1960s and 1970s. During those years, a quantitative and then qualitative increase in the building sector (Abadan-Unat et al. 1975: 290–304)¹⁴, coupled with a similar increase in small workshops oriented towards production of construction and household items (van Velzen 1977: 173) led to lively commercial activity among civil engineers/building contractors, skilled craftsmen (for woodwork or ironwork), transporters, traders in building materials, such as paint, plaster or in raw materials such as wood and iron (Abadan-Unat et al. 1975: 290–303 and van Velzen 1977: 53). There was also a parallel rise in the furniture sector entailing relations between furniture makers (carpenters) and traders in »formica, hardboard, foam and rubber, upholstery textiles, etc.« (van Velzen 1977: 57).

Professional and business connections involved also such rightwing-dominated organizations as the Association of Craftsmen Unions (*Esnaf Birlikleri Derneği*), Kayseri Chamber of Commerce, and the Kayseri Chamber of Industry. While the leaders of these associations were local JP elites and the JP mem-

11 Not all initial leaders of the local MG took executives posts in Kayseri.

12 Among the men of religion, one was the director of the Prayer Leader and Preacher School and a literature teacher in a vocational school in Kayseri in the 1960s before moving to Ankara.

13 There were also three individuals trading in auto parts or repair, one trading in wood, one worker (unspecified), six professionals (two pharmacists, one optician, one technical draftsman, one manager and one lawyer), one grocery store owner, and one trader (unspecified) (*Milli Nizam Partisi Siyasi Parti Kapatma Davası*, 1971)

14 The term »qualitative increase« refers here to professionalization of the construction business.

bers constituted the majority of the rank and file, all colors of the rightwing were present.

Religious networks, in turn, involved relations between men of religion and lay Muslims. Most men of religion were employed by the state in local mosques, the Advanced Institute for Islam, and the Prayer Leader and Preacher School. Traditional religious scholars were preaching or teaching religious subjects in various mosques scattered around town or in their homes. The *Naqshbandi*¹⁵ disciples of Mahmut Sami Efendi of Erenköy or Yahyalılı Hacı Hasan Efendi formed another religious network, which was connected, sometimes even overlapping with the latter two.¹⁶ Several smaller religious charity organizations, usually led by the local JP elites, allowed the formation of relations outside the boundaries of basic religious practices (i. e., prayers, funerals, and Qur'an classes).¹⁷

Finally, the network of »native« Kayseri families (*yerliler*) as a source for MG activist recruitment needs to be mentioned. In Kayseri, families which claimed to be the original habitants of downtown Kayseri formed a network apart, which transcended political, social and economic positions and statuses of individuals. They all knew each other at least by name, had some connection with each other through marriages, business partnerships or »Vineyard house« neighborhoods in the outskirts of the Erciyes Mountain.¹⁸

Politico-cultural associations and an informal local institution called »*oturma*« (literally: sitting) were the two social settings where the above mentioned networks converged, and rightwing ideational elements produced and reproduced. In such associations as the Turkish Cultural Association (*Türk Kültür Derneği*) or Büyük Doğu Club, students of high schools and Advanced Institutes for Islam and Education, men working in the factories, marketplace or in the industrial zone attended conferences of famous right wing poets and writers, read right wing publications (especially *Büyük Doğu*), or just chatted informally at association head-

15 *Naqshbandiyya* is a *tarikât*, or a mystical brotherhood, which dates back to 14th century India. The *Naqshbandi* brotherhood has historically been organized in various autonomous, even independent, branches in various regions in Turkey (and elsewhere). *Tarikât* literally means path an individual who enters a brotherhood, then chooses a particular path to travel to God under the spritual leadership of the religious leader.

16 Until the mid-1970s, in Kayseri, the *Nur* student community, then quite small, was neither well-known nor much appreciated within these religious circles.

17 Kayseri hosted a high number of professional and religious associations. In 1968, there were 359 religious associations including 263 organizations for construction of mosques (Yücekök 1971: 178–188 and the Appendix).

18 Symbolic differences did not mean a strict exclusion of the non-natives, or »the peasants.« To diversify and extend their social capital the natives tried to assimilate them and the »peasants« tried to blend in. For capital reconversion and »nobility« reproduction see (de Saint Martin 1993)

quarters. Together with the above-mentioned professional, business and religious associations, they organized major right wing demonstrations in Kayseri.¹⁹

Oturma, regular informal meetings of a group of men or families, brought together members of different networks in the intimate setting of individuals' homes. In some cases, they harked back as long as 50 years.²⁰ Originally a »native« tradition, *oturma* was the social context that enabled men who had got acquainted and grew affection for each other within various contexts to deepen their relationships into life-long friendships. *Oturma* members were not necessarily from the same business networks, nor from the same professional milieus. Even their political allegiances could differ.²¹ As such, this institution provided an ideal context for exchanging news or ideas on the city's social, economic, and political life.²² In fact, the national MG elites were able to get access to some influential local men who had been frequenting various *oturma* groups in town. Their acquaintances and friends of Kayseri origin in the Islamist engineer-civil servant circles in Ankara and Istanbul formed the early bridges between the national and local levels. Once a relationship was established, the *oturma* began to serve as a platform where the MG ideational elements, notwithstanding the actual rate of participation into the MG and the way in which specific actors received them, could circulate and penetrate into the right wing networks.

Finally, two types of socio-spatial settings, the workspaces and the downtown mosques, constituted the everyday context of most MG activists and the other members of the networks. Within the ancient marketplace (*çarşı*) and the old industrial zone (*sanayi*) in downtown Kayseri, tradesmen, small shop and workshop owners, with or without business dealings, established relations by virtue of being neighbors, belonging to a native Kayseri family, coming from the same subdistrict of Kayseri, or frequenting the same mosque for mid-day and afternoon prayers.

The mosques within or close to the marketplace (Camii Kebir and Hunat Camii), on the other hand, brought together the vicinity's small traders, craftsmen,

19 A news item that appeared in a local ultranationalist daily on the Rise Up (*Şahlanış Mitingi*) meeting of 1968 in Kayseri provides a laundry list of these associations. *Yeni Sabah*, March 30, 1968.

20 The longest standing *oturma* group mentioned in the interviews has been around for 52 years

21 It should, however, be noted that members would belong either to rightwing or leftwing. Leftwing *oturmas* do not seem to be prevalent. Either there were less »native« leftwing members, or they preferred public places like the city club, restaurants or coffeehouses.

22 An insightful discussion of *oturma* demonstrates how this institution has evolved over the years so as to substitute for formal and informal open public channels of local policy making such as political parties, associations, urban spaces. While previously they were social resources for political parties, today they (particularly those of the rich that convene at the outskirts of Erciyes) have become the dominant institutions overpowering even the political parties. (Doğan 2007: 242–252).

engineers, and others. for prayers and provided a relaxing environment where small talk, exchange of information and news regularly took place.²³

Differential Recruitment/Entry to MG in Kayseri

By 1969, shortly before the establishment of the NOP, Islamist party entrepreneurs, under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan, began to shape and disseminate their mobilization and identity frames at the national and local levels of the political arena. On the one hand, they echoed their unorganized Islamist predecessors of the 1950s and early 1960s. They called for material and moral development of the country, defined the nation as primarily »Muslim« without abandoning »Turkishness« and claimed to represent this nation. On the other hand, they brought two major novelties to this frame, distinguishing them from the contemporary and past Islamists. These novelties aimed at recruiting the members of the right wing milieus, particularly discontented JP activists and sympathizers.

First, the MG elites, based on their own experiences at the national level of politics and inspired also from the rising left, created an economic injustice component. They claimed that the large businesses of Istanbul and Izmir were favored at the expense of »Muslim« Anatolian small and medium enterprises, and got most of the foreign credits, bank credits and investments.²⁴ Second, they introduced direct political engagement through the establishment of a political party as a religious duty and a historical responsibility to the Muslim ancestors. The MG was not a simple partisan enterprise, but rather a collective action of people who »shared the same religious faith« to establish »the National Order« and unity, and fight against vanity and blasphemy through solidarity, cooperation and bonds of love.²⁵ A faithful Muslim would fight against »injustice and evil« through »selfless political action« (Aksay 1971: 18–19).

A right wing ethos emphasizing Muslimness and Turkishness, piety and a peripheral position vis-à-vis the administrative and economic centers were common to *all* the members of rightwing networks. Thus, the call for moral and material development and injustice frames had the potential for mobilization within these milieus. Yet, relatively few members of these networks joined the MG ranks as ac-

23 It should be added that collective morning prayers organized by the Islamist daily *Bugün* all over the country took place in Hunat Camii, bringing together not only the regular mosque community but also participants from greater Kayseri and neighboring towns.

24 For a discussion of how they constructed their economic injustice frame by the late 1960s see (Gencil Sezgin 2013: 88–91).

25 Hüseyin Abbas at the NOP Opening Ceremony in Kırklareli in October 6, 1970 (*Milli Nizam Partisi Siyasi Parti Kapatma Davası*, 1971).

tivists or supported its parties in the elections. Even *Naqshbandis* did not show much interest until the mid-1970s, most refusing to vote for the MG parties, let alone becoming new party's activists.²⁶ Three interrelated intervening factors seem to explain the differential recruitment at the periphery: to begin with, individuals' structural position within the *local* economic and political networks needs to be taken into account. That is, it was not the marginalization vis-à-vis the »center« *per se*, but the relative marginalization which seems to be a factor for different levels of interest to the new party initiative (see also Gould 1998: 36–53). While the discontented JP local executives (owners of small and medium businesses), delegates and members (mostly small merchants and craftsman) were peripheral vis-à-vis Istanbul and Ankara, unlike the (future) MG activists, they occupied the center of socio-economic and political life in Kayseri. The JP circles, who made up the majority of the right wing milieus, dominated the local Municipal and General District Assemblies, the local chambers of commerce and industry, and enjoyed extensive clientelistic ties thanks to JP's incumbency (see also Gencel Sezgin 2013: 84–87, 91). Small and medium sized business owners controlled even the professional associations of small shop owners and artisans and siphoned their resources (Bianchi 1984: 136).

Second, a prior engagement to, or identification with, a collective actor, or its lack thereof (»multivalent influences at the individual level«), seems to have played a role in the decision to participate in MG (Kitts 2000: 252). For instance, the JP activists were deeply entrenched in all religious networks, some were as pious as or more pious than the future MG activists,²⁷ or equally situated at a peripheral position within the periphery. However, joining MG would mean betrayal of their cause and their history. Since the Democrat Party years, especially having endured immense pressure following the coup d'état of 1960, they had acquired a strong sense of collective identity against the state elites represented by the RPP and the military.

Third, *ceteris paribus*, generational factor, political parties' organizational and symbolic institutions, and perceptions of the MG actors of these parties seem to have created a potential pool of recruits without prior party identification. Existing major right wing political parties, perceived as either too competitive (JP) or too authoritarian (NAP), failed to integrate ambitious and dynamic professional young men at the beginning of their social and economic careers. The intensity of

26 Interviews with local MG and JP activists 2006–2009. Islamist and conservative newspapers, particularly *Bizim Anadolu*, sympathetic to MG in its early years, did not report any sizeable groups of delegates and executives leaving the JP or the NAP.

27 For instance, the pious JP activists worked in (and even presided over) the same religious associations with the Islamists.

JP's intra-organizational competition required extensive social, economic and political capital. The MG activists, who were simply too young to have accumulated such capital,²⁸ and lacking direct connections with the national centers to accumulate in the foreseeable future, despised JP's factional disputes and perceived JP activists as selfish individuals engaged in petty politics. The NAP, in turn, seemed to be unable to accommodate new ideas and individuals with potential for leadership. Moreover, it was blamed (though tolerated) by most members of the right wing milieu as the perpetrator of violent acts in the town, a condition that had particularly repelled the MG activists.²⁹

The attributes of individuals who joined MG were as follows: socially and economically upwardly mobile, religious and relatively young shop owners, artisans, engineers, and traders without prior engagements to collective entities. As was also the case for the NSP parliamentary candidates (Toprak 1981: 105–107), they were professionally successful, mostly well educated, and were *not* traditional shop owners and artisans who had been impacted negatively by modernization and deployed religion to contest the power-holders. Nevertheless, they had limited and dependent access to the networks that tied the periphery to the center, and to the center of the periphery. Thus, it was *not* their »deep interest in religion« which distinguished them from their counterparts,³⁰ but a sense of injustice they experienced at the local level vis-à-vis the dominant members of their networks. Hence, MG elites' frames of injustice and material and moral development, and their call (and promise) to change the status quo with a »noble cause« attracted them. They did not constitute a »counter elite« with deeper religious sensibilities as of yet. The counter elites, as shall be seen in the next section, were a product of MG collective identity formation.

28 According to the documents in the MNP's Constitutional Court trial records of 1971, the average age of the official founders of the MNP's Kayseri Central District organization was 28.5 while the executives of local JP were in their late 40s (Gencil Sezgin 2013: 91, 98). See also (Tachau 1973: 286).

29 The NAP appealed more to traditional shop owners or artisans, and mainly vied for the attention of even younger generations in schools.

30 Having studied the educational and professional backgrounds of the parliamentary candidates from the NSP and compared them to the candidates of other political parties, Binnaz Toprak concludes that the NSP's contenders were different from others in their »deep interest in religion, in fact, »counter elites« (1981: 107–108). However, a closer look at the candidates from Kayseri and Konya shows that the majority in the NSP's electoral lists were mainly the local elites of the NSP with no or little chance to be elected. As a matter of fact, despite their educational and professional backgrounds, they had had limited access to the above mentioned networks.

MG's Islamist Identity Formation at the Local Level

In studying »organized racism,« focusing on white supremacist groups in the United States, Kathleen Blee argues that since »whiteness« is an ambiguous, »un-marked«, even an »invisible« category in a white-dominated society where existing policies and goods that benefit the whites »are seldom acknowledged as racial in their intent or consequences« and only »non-whites« are remarked through »otherness« (2002: 56), the racist groups have difficulties in trying to draw and justify the boundaries of both whiteness and their collectivities. The whiteness is identified with »political commitment as much as biology« (2002: 63) and the whites are »those who act on behalf of the white race as a whole – and those who are steadfast personal friends ...« (2002: 71).

For the MG elites and activists, the secular(ist) attitudes of the elites of the existing right and left-wing parties, the military and judicial bureaucracy, and the existence of Kemalist secularism as the dominant component of the national political field's *doxa*, facilitated the drawing of symbolic boundaries through the adoption of Islamic signs and symbols.³¹ (Re)defining the nation as primarily Muslim, public displays of basic religious rituals such as daily prayers, ablution, fasting and emphasis on conservatism regarding gender roles, and finally denying Muslim subjectivity to the elites of the mainstream parties,³² with the white supremacist groups: the invisibility of Muslimness in a Muslim dominated society. While claiming to represent the right-wing dominated social networks and Muslims, the NSP's local activists began to differentiate themselves and their Muslimness from other (pious) Muslims. In other words, they had to distinguish themselves from other Muslims of their locality to avoid blurring boundaries without, however, creating a rupture that could have endangered their pretension to represent the Muslims.

Specifically, in order to make sense of their being together, and to draw more »solid« symbolic boundaries, the MG activists strived to become »good« and »honest« Muslims³³ worthy of representing the Muslim nation. First, the MG elites' reconceptualization of Muslim as a politically conscious and active subject

31 For a discussion on how Islamist frames can both reproduce and challenge the *doxa* of the Turkish political field see (Çınar and Gencel Sezgin 2013: 335–338).

32 For instance, according to the report of the Government Inspector at the NOP Opening Ceremony in Karabük in May 31, 1970, Hüseyin Abbas attacked prime minister Süleyman Demirel saying »He pretends to be Muslim, [but he is actually] a freemason« (*Millî Nizam Partisi Siyasi Parti Kapatma Davası*, 1971).

33 Among the interviewees »iyi« (good) and »dürüst« (honest) were the two adjectives used frequently together with the word »Muslim« in order to refer to fellow activists and to some non-MG friends and acquaintances.

was internalized by MG activists, despite their thitherto aversion to party politics. They achieved a certain level of homogeneity where non-stringent-movement resource as well, and individuals began to compete with each other in being »good Muslims.«

Ismail argues that religious orthodoxy (i.e., stringency) of the Islamists entailed adopting »an evaluative grid whose main components are the ideas of truth and falsehood, and the categories of *halal* (licit) and *haram* (illicit)« (2003: 62). Within the Kayseri context, in fact, in Anatolia, while piety of an individual was in the eye of the beholder, as the interviews with both the MG and non-MG activists revealed, the most stringent Muslim of or thought to be socially inappropriate, pretentious or even heterodox. While the outcome was different for the individual MG activists, they shared the following properties: first, they became dissatisfied with the »basic« Islamic rituals, and jointly and individually tried to accumulate knowledge of the Hadith and Sunna to be able to apply them meticulously in daily life. As the words of an interviewee illustrates:

We were inviting religious masters (Hocaefendiler) to our oturma sessions. We were trying to learn Islam. I learned Islam during that period ... Previously, even though I was doing my daily prayers, I had not known Islam.³⁴

Second, in their daily lives they introduced the use of religious signs and symbols in novel ways and situations. For instance, men started to grow beards, women began to veil before marriage, and they began using the Islamic salutation »Esse-lamun Aleykum« not only in face-to-face interactions but also in telephone conversations, which clearly differentiated the MG activists from ordinary Muslims, at times, provoking reactions.³⁵ Third, their definition (and perception) of individual piety was extended so as to cover not only their own religiousness but also the behavior of the immediate family, principally the children. Most of the pious local elites of the JP (i.e., those who joined the activities of religious associations, regularly performed daily prayers, fasted during the Ramadan and made their pilgrimage) had displayed a liberal attitude towards the actions and choices of their daughters or sons regarding religious matters, though not necessarily their wives. The MG activists, in contrast, had been personally involved in the religious education and direction of their children trying to render them »conscious« and »honest« Muslims. The following excerpt appeared in a Konya based MG newspaper during the early months of the MG mobilization and reflects how the behavior of the immediate family could be used for multiple purposes: to measure the level

34 Interview with KayNS8, Kayseri, September 14, 2006.

35 Interview with KayNS19, Kayseri, September 28, 2006.

of religiousness among the pious, to attract the religious among the ranks of the MG and persuade them to buy an MG-affiliated newspaper - a symbol of both religiosity and belonging to the collectivity:

»Imagine a head of the family; he is a quite pious (mazbut) person. He fulfills his religious duties regularly. He also became a pilgrim (hacı). Both his wife and his daughter accommodated themselves to his lifestyle. While the wife is sincere in her conformity, the daughter follows the orders of his father willy-nilly. A particularity of this head of the family is also his tenderness towards his children. Consequently, he has to put the newspaper with promiscuous photos in his pocket and bring it home. Despite that neither the wife nor the daughter wears skirts above their knees³⁶ ... one day, by accident, this honorable head of the family comes across with his daughter in the street. Surprise, the skirt of the daughter is a miniskirt ... Yes the pilgrims, the masters (hacılar, hocalar), honorable heads of the family: choose carefully the newspaper you would bring home.«³⁷

Finally, they avoided, to the best of their ability, the social environments where they might have to mingle with the opposite sex, or with those who consume alcoholic drinks. This form of religious stringency was not necessarily a result of a traditional education or culture. Nor was it a simple emotional recognition of the need to differentiate oneself. Since the MG elites increased the value of the »religious card« in circulation within the local political field, it was also the result of the pressure on the part of the MG activists' rivals who challenged them to live up to the total Muslim identity they declared to possess. A very illustrative example was the change of attitude of an MG local executive when a newspaper published his photos taken during a dinner party organized for the alumni of his university. Though he was not drinking alcohol, he had not seen any harm in sitting at a table with his old friends who were drinking, and he even danced with them. Using the photos of him at the table and dancing, the newspaper insinuated that the MG activists were not as Muslim as they pretended to be, but were merely »using Islam« to attract votes. Although his fellow MG activists did not reprimand the executive, he (decided to) never set foot again in a similar social environment.³⁸

36 One should draw attention to the fact that while the proper measure for Islamic modesty was a skirt below the knees for the Islamists of the years under consideration, today, the Islamist and non-Islamist religious women barely show their ankles.

37 Ziya Tanrıkulu, »Ölçü, Gazete seçmek,« *Türkiye'de Yarım*, November 11, 1969

38 Interview with KayNS8, Kayseri, September 14, 2006. Korkut Özal, the NSP Minister of Food, Agriculture and Stockbreeding in the First National Front Government (I. Milliyetçi Cephe), in 1975 was involved in a similar incident. First nationally distributed JP supporter

The religious stringency, and the call for political engagement through the establishment of a political party, were valuable symbolic resources for activist mobilization. It was through committed activists that the MG could attract further members and the voters. However, at least during the period under consideration, even among the pious, the activists risked heterodoxy, which may have helped the secularist elites stigmatize the incipient movement.

Conclusion

Focusing on the right wing milieus, differential recruitment to the MG, and the practices and identity frames of the MG activists, this paper examined the formation and construction of the MG's collective identity from a relational and localized perspective. The adoption of religious stringency and redefinition of Muslim as a subject engaging in party activism were the major components of MG's Islamist identity that emerged and developed within the context of power relations of local networks.

Based on the fieldwork data, it can be concluded that, first, MG's Islamist identity emerged and developed not only in opposition to the secularist elites of the center, or at the national level politics, but also in action and interaction within the local networks, social and spatial settings. Second, Islam presents both a pool of resources and a *constraint* for an incipient religious collective actor. On the one hand, MG elites and activists innovatively tapped into rich Islamic signs, symbols and traditions to challenge the national power holders and to articulate local demands *with* the national level of politics. Moreover, they recruited further activists and acquired a sense of »we,« dotted with political responsibility, altruism, empowerment, affection. On the other hand, to the extent that Islam was a shared and contested source among Muslims within the right wing networks, and a valuable capital within the movement itself, within the context of the late 1960s and 1970s, it pushed MG activists to borderline social and political heterodoxy while claiming to represent those very networks and the »Muslim Nation« – that is, orthodoxy. Finally, examining the identity process at the local level demonstrates that the route to the establishment and consolidation of MG was neither linear nor predetermined. MG cannot be considered a direct and aggregate result of a cultural (or economic, for that matter) cleavage between the center and periphery, or an *a priori* Muslim identity.

Tercüman and then Yeni Asya published his photos raising a glass at a state event in Germany. *Yeni Asya*, May 1, 1977.

The case at hand, thus, shows that Islamist identity processes are, a) dynamic and formed in action and interaction *during* mobilization not before, b) products of both creative/intentional and unintentional/subliminal processes, c) multifaceted, as they are shaped in relation to both national elites/centers and within local environments. As far as today's Turkey is concerned, the empirical and analytical insights gained from studying the MG case in Kayseri are relevant to the extent that they provide a starting point to examine the emergence and establishment of the incumbent Justice and Development Party (AKP) as an off-spring of the MG. The divisions among the elites of the MG, the impact of state interventions to its parties, and the eventual establishment of the AKP have been subject to scholarly and journalistic analyses. The local level is yet to be extensively studied. The AKP networks include not only the majority of the decades old MG circles, but also non-Islamist right wing social and political groups. To understand whether and how these networks merged to bring about the AKP and its non-Islamist, avowedly »conservative-democratic« collective identity, necessitates examining how and why the dominant center-right party (the continuation of the JP, the True Path and the Motherland Parties) networks lost their central position and dominance at the periphery. How did their gradual material and ideational disappearance affect the MG activists and their identity process, and vice versa?

Throughout the late 1980s and 1990s, MG activists and members had been enjoying easier and more stable access to the state controlled resources at and through the local level despite the frequent and extreme difficulties the party organization faced at the national level thanks to party closures. How did becoming a member of the center of the periphery, increased material and symbolic resources, and the gradual establishment of clientelistic ties with ideationally divergent groups and individuals affect the MG's identity and eventually contribute to the formation of the AKP? Answering this question would provide a more complete picture of the transformations and continuities within the MG and the AKP.³⁹

Capturing fully the changes and ruptures within Islamist movements, especially the cases of »moderation/radicalization,« and addressing the puzzles of competition and cooperation among various Islamist and non-Islamist actors in time and space require abandonment of ideational essentialisms and structural determinisms. A localized and relational perspective would potentially facilitate this endeavor.

39 Cihan Tuğal's study of the ex-MG, new AKP networks in Sultanbeyli, Istanbul is an excellent and early example of such an approach (2009). Weaving his analysis from the bottom up, and focusing on the transformations and continuities within the lives of individuals and networks, he reveals the »passive revolution« that Turkey has been experiencing for the last decade.

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